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Introduction

For many parts of Africa and Asia a rural society is often a pedestrian society. There are limited means of transport; the peasant is largely immobilized and his movement to the outside is a major undertaking. He lives in an economic and political microcosm. Typically his world may be ten miles long and twelve miles wide, bounded by where a road comes through a swamp and ending where it drifts over the hills. It is a world that is effectively cut off from the outside; in his own view the pedestrian lives on an island, surrounded by a vast sea of the uninhabited and the unknown.

A majority of Africans are still ruralites; in many regions a man will spend most of his life on foot, encapsulated in his village area, with only occasional access to some conveyance. His relations with a central government will be non-existent, or at best episodic. He is part of the remote periphery, far removed from the centre of government and vastly more numerous than the cadre of elite who make up the centre. Given these conditions it may be asked then, why do so many professional analysts continue to view central-local relations from the myopic vantage-point of the centre only? Aside from the mistakes, distortions, and misadventures in print, we essentially still know very little about the vast majority of African society. In the present period the 'remote' periphery remains remote analytically.

More specifically, the nature of the local political and economic systems, and the way they shape the attitudes, perceptions, and motivations of peasant farmers is among the most significant problems of African research. Facts at the empirical level and detailed descriptions of modern peasant life are badly needed. There is also a need for middle range theoretical models that have

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been evolved either from the more rarified theories or from empirical findings. It is in this area of micro studies, in the nature of the periphery, that our ignorance of Africa is still of a continental dimension.[1]

The aim of this article will be to lay out the basic characteristics of a pedestrian society, and then to suggest how these characteristics fit into some theoretical framework. The main assumption is that for many parts of the developing world there are areas that are spatially isolated from urban centres. The economic and political life of the inhabitants in these areas is that of immobilized subsistence farmers. By laying out their basic life style as pedestrian, we are arguing that this pattern is the lowest common denominator in terms of mobility. There are of course some individuals in the pedestrian society who are occasionally mobilized. There are also over-lapping life styles — equestrian or more mechanized patterns — that touch a basically pedestrian society. The focus here is, however, the individual living in an immobilized life style. He is furthest out on the periphery of government; he is at the nerve-ending of the entire governmental process. It is here that grass root understanding of centre-local relations must begin.

The Pedestrian Society

The general characteristics that distinguish a pedestrian society may be described in four parts: political, economic, ecological, and social-psychological.

Political Characteristics. The distance a man must walk to have an authoritative decision made or a dispute settled above the family level determines the boundaries of his basic political microcosm. This is usually the distance a man can travel in a half day in order to hold a political meeting and return to his homestead before nightfall. The fear of travelling after dark because of superstitions or marauding animals, the fear of incurring obligations or expenses of lodging, and the wish not to leave one's family alone at night, all keep a man's effective political arena small. The distance to a headman's house or a sub-chief's house will have to be ten to twelve miles or less. If the distance is any greater, it will be too far in terms of time, expense, and personal security.

The political microcosm is based on the acceptance of face-to-face authority. One's neighbours and leaders are known intimately and seen frequently. Face-to-face relations are the form of all interactions. Kinship ties, and their obligations dictate a man's relative political position. Traditional boundaries such as chiefdoms or clan boundaries remain largely intact. Often modern

1. For further debate see Norman N. Miller, ed., *Research in Rural Africa* (Michigan State University, 1969), 13-22 (originally published, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, III, 1); H. Glickman in R. Lystad, ed., *The African's World* (New York, 1965), 133-7.

administrative boundaries designating local government areas are based on traditional boundaries, and individuals make no distinction between the traditional and modern.

A pedestrian society's political characteristics would have parallels to its economic style. A man will travel to a political authority in the same way he travels to an economic market place. His political and economic world may be the same, and the political services he seeks may be at the same village centre as the economic services. Political services would be based on local practices of obligation, reciprocity, and expectations; these might include a need for decisions in conflict situations, needs for resources, information, advice status rewards, and the like.

Each individual peasant lives in some spatial relation to the local political authority. There are fundamental principles of order from the peasant viewpoint, by which he spatially relates to a central authority. Certain individuals live on the fringe of two political areas, and may in fact use different political authorities for different issues, just as their economic and political areas may not necessarily be the same.

In terms of communication, two major distinctions exist for the pedestrian society. In what many be termed the 'Land Rover phenomenon', higher level officials of the government of party occasionally visit the village area. These situations are much like circuit riding judges of bygone frontier times. The official arrives, a meeting is called, discussions are held and decisions are made. The official then rides out of the village and back to his district or regional capital. He may or may not have dealt with the real leaders, he may or may not have reached village consensus, and his decisions may simply not be accepted. Although African, he is alien to the village. He does not live there, he is not known intimately, and is very different in wealth, education, and the way he makes a living.

Other forms of communication between the district and village level are equally episodic and poorly maintained. The links between the centre and the periphery break down at the last step of the process. Bad logistics, nonexistent telephones, erratic mails, and poor personal interaction between district level and village leaders effectively curtails information flowing to the villages. The diffusion of technical innovations, ideas and information are often not received at the periphery, nor do the needs and demands of the peasants flow up to higher levels of government.

Economic Characteristics. The pedestrian's life is typified by a low level of technology and labour intensive conditions — usually on limited acreage of low-yield land which is often poorly endowed with natural resources. He has little capital, little or no savings, and is only occasionally in the money economy. He has no self-sustaining growth potential, and uses a high degree of

routine labour techniques. Because he is probably a citizen of a pre-industrial state he has no access to high-cost imported tools.[2]

In addition, wealth-levelling mechanisms affect many peasants. They must spend a great deal of time and resources on communal offices. Most posts in the village hierarchy require some loss of work time. Higher level responsibilities have greater direct costs. This political office in economic terms is often unrewarding and not sought after unless some economic gain attends the office. Those who do attain wealth are often obliged to expend it for communal ends. Rituals, feasts, and ceremonies with eating and drinking can quickly consume any personal wealth.

Ecological Characteristics. The ways in which human beings relate to the dictates of their environment are also major defining characteristics of a pedestrian society. The agrarian life style affects nearly all other considerations. The time of planting, and the harvest season set the basic yearly timetable. Litigation and other political activity diminish during the peak seasons. The shortage of rain, or conversely, incidence of flooding, will change the entire life-style of a village and lead to increased ritualistic measures to counteract the calamity.

For many areas the growing seasons are short, and two rainy seasons per year essentially allow for two planting seasons for some crops. Thus the agrarian cycle may occur twice in a given year. These conditions keep an individual bound to the land. Although the work day for men is often short, there are no long slack periods which would encourage travel.

Other ecological factors that directly affect the peasant include land ownership and land tenure patterns. The location of a new homestead in relation to the political and economic central places of a village will depend on the land tenure practices. If, for example, a newly-married farmer could acquire land close to the village centre, his probability of gaining more economic and political information, and of becoming a leader in the local hierarchy, would be greater. Water ownership and water sharing patterns would also directly effect the pedestrian's life style. Agricultural methods dictate, among other things, the amount of information and cooperation that occur. For example, if the local agricultural techniques call for communal action, such as rice growing, information flow and cooperation would be high. If the basic patterns are more individualistic, such as mixed-vegetable farming, less exchange of information and less cooperation could be expected.

Social-Psychological Characteristics. Several distinguishing factors for a pedestrian society lie in the area of motivations, beliefs, and knowledge-levels. In terms of literacy, the individual would either be pre-literate, never having been exposed to the written word, or illiterate, having no mastery over sym-

2. Manning Nash, *Primitive and Peasant Economic Systems* (San Francisco, 1966).

bols in their written form. He would be fatalistic, in that the feeling that he lacks the ability to control the future would commonplace. In terms of achievement motivation, measured as a desire for personal accomplishment, the individual would be generally apathetic. Agricultural innovativenesss, assessed as the rapidity of adopting new ideas would be low. Political knowledge would be mainly limited to local institutions and vague ideas of a few national leaders. Economic knowledge would centre on prices and marketability of crops grown, or goods and services sought. Both educational and occupational aspirations, for oneself and one's children would depend on contact with the outside world. Such aspirations would rise in terms of the individual's cosmopolitan experience.[3]

Most pedestrians would have little sense of empathy, in that they would have little capacity to identify with new aspects of their environment, or see themselves in another individual's situation.[4]

Concepts of time are also exceptionally important. Time may be either seen as linear, that is a sequence of programmed events with unique characteristics, or as an endless repetitive circle. The idea of progress within the circular view is nearly non-existent; most members of a pedestrian society would hold a circular view of time. In essence, time constitutes an endless cycle. Everything meaningful which occurs must be a variation of the predictable events of this cycle; events which cannot be construed in this manner are simply not meaningful. A member of a pedestrian society acquires in childhood a concept of life as a predictable cycle. This cycle must be short enough that the number of variations which may occur within one's life are seen as repetitions. They are the same basic events predictably recurring.

Overall, the pedestrian has a short time horizon. The future is unsure, and will be viewed as a narrow period of time. Fatalism persists; the willingness to gamble on future events is almost non-existent. In short, the individual has little knowledge of the outside world, and little concept of linear time. He lives in continual insecurity, plagued throughout his life by the threat of natural disaster. To paraphrase Hobbes, his life is often solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.

Central Places of Political Authority

It may be argued that some ordering principles govern the spatial distribution of political power around a central nucleus. The smallest unit for a pedestrian would be that political authority that serves two or more homesteads,

3. For a broader threatment of these characteristics see Everett M. Rogers with Lynne Svenning, *Modernization Among Peasants* (New York, 1969).

4. Described by Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society* (New York, 1958), 49-50.

that is the authority immediately above the family level. This may be called the central place of authority phenomena.[5] A hierarchy of political central places would exist for any given peasant, starting with the most immediate authority such as a headman or party cell chairman, and ranging through increasingly higher forms of authority. The central place authority may be looked at spatially as a nucleus around which the homesteads of several peasant farmers are located.

The basic function of the central place authority is to provide political services for the surrounding area. These services would include 1) authoritative decision-making between families, 2) arbitration in political disputes, 3) translation of political demands from higher authority, 4) communication of political news, and 5) allocation of scarce resources such as wage labour, positions, free transport, honorific appointments, invitations to feasts, and other status rewards.[6]

In addition to a spatial hierarchy of areas covered, there would also be a hierarchy of services provided. The larger the population served, the higher the order of services. This would include a greater number of political decisions, arbitrations, mediations, and a larger volume of political resources allocated. In larger central places a greater variety of services are offered. The higher order centres are fewer, more broad in scope, and perform all the services of the lower order centres. Every type of political service has a special range. Seen from the pedestrian's viewpoint, the more specialized services exist at the greater distances. For example, he must travel farther to present a serious political demand to a district party official than to a village party official. He must travel farther to get to a district court in lieu of a headman's 'court'.

The types of political authority that can be distinguished for many parts of Africa are on three levels:

1) *Individual authority* such as a headman, sub-chief, party or administrative official, making decisions on the basis of personal knowledge of the people involved.

2) *Group authority* such as a village council, party headquarters, or local government office in which decisions concerning the individual are made by several local leaders in accordance with both personal knowledge of the individuals and the regulations governing the group activity.

3) *Institutional, legalistic authority* as a local court, district party office, administrative office, or cooperative union headquarters in which knowledge of the individual plays little or no part.

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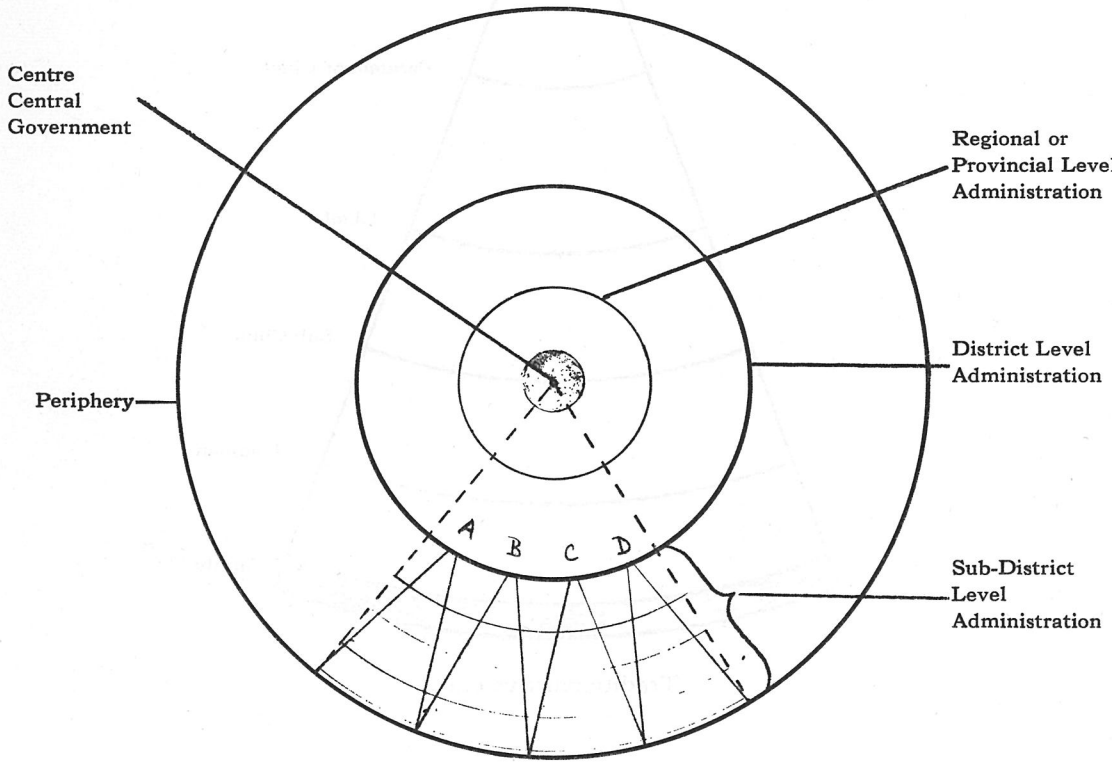
5. Stimulus for these ideas comes from the work of W. Christaller and other central place theorists. See Brian J. L. Berry, and Alen Pred, *Central Place Studies: A Bibliography of Theory and Applications* (Regional Science Research Institute, Philadelphia, 1965).

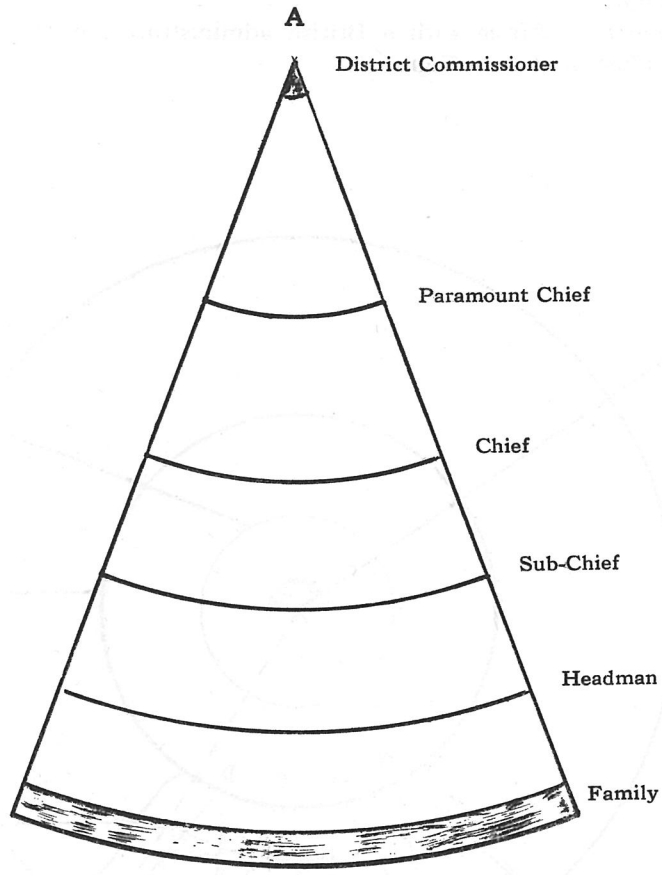
6. Political services would be comparable to the economic services of central place markets, such as distribution, storage, transport, communication of economic information, etc.

In terms of hierarchy of authority several levels may be distinguished in the institutions that touch the pedestrian directly. Most local areas would have a traditional political system still partially in operation, a local government system and possibly a court and party system. Each level within the structures would represent a central place of authority. Such centres would have institutional contacts to district, provincial, and central government levels of authority.

For much of Africa with a British administrative heritage, the structures could be illustrated as in Figure 1.

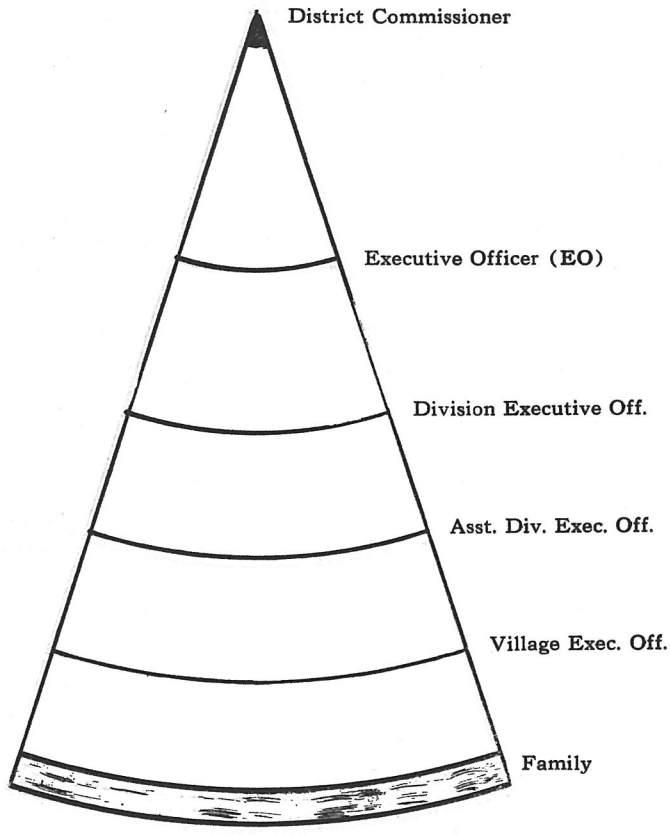


Specific authority levels at the sub-district (local) level might include the following, as lifted out of Figure 1:

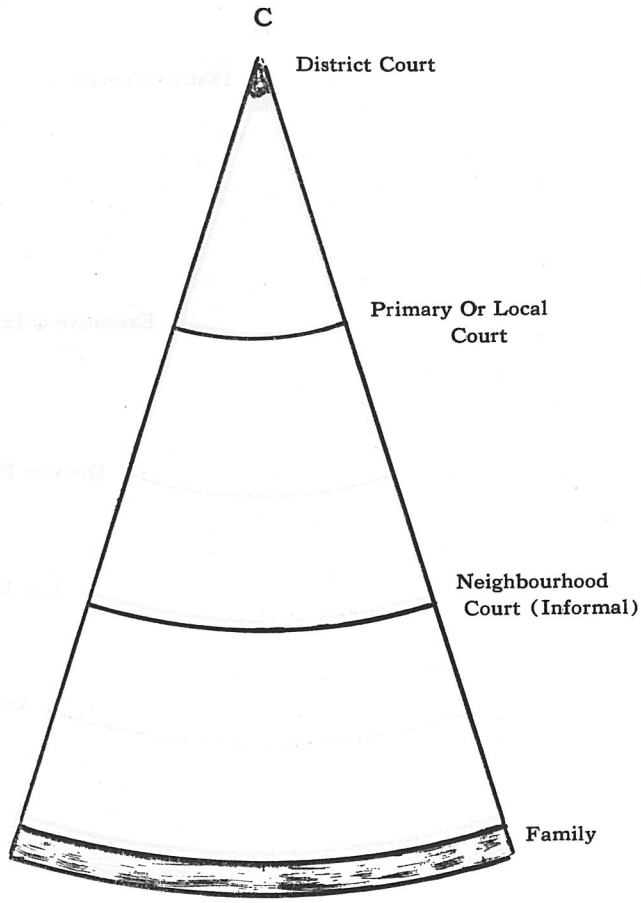


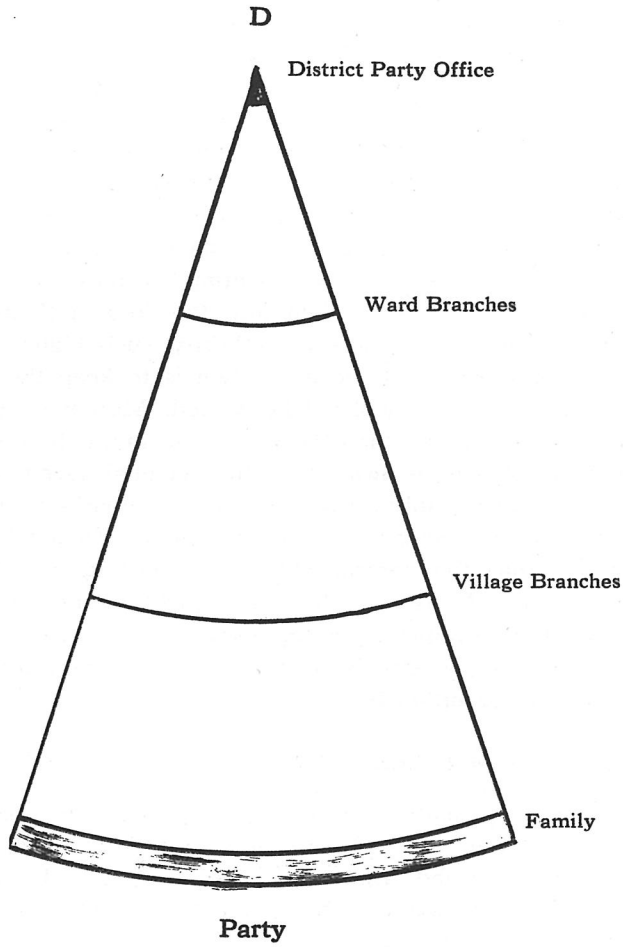
Traditional System

B



Local Government Structure
(Tanzania)


C
District Court
Primary Or Local Court
Neighbourhood Court (Informal)
Family
Court


D
District Party Office
Ward Branches
Village Branches
Family
Party

The relative range of services provided by any particular central place authority is determined by factors such as: 1) the size and importance of the district or region, 2) the population served surrounding the political central place, 3) the subjective political distance from the pedestrian's homestead and the willingness of the pedestrian to make an attempt to secure the service, 4) the quantity, quality and price of the political services as perceived by the pedestrian, 5) the cost of the trip, and 6) the intensity of the political needs. The need for the service skews the peasant toward the higher order political centres, and as the intensity of the need increases, toward the large urban political centres.

The central place analogy breaks down somewhat in the 'Land Rover phenomenon'. Circuit riding authorities interject a market day syndrome into the local political process. Like periodic fairs, the arrival of an outside authority permits the farmer to present his demand without walking to the higher order of authority. He is thus circumventing the most local political authority. However, because of fear of alienating the local influentials, and because there is often a mistrust of outside authority, such higher channels are often not used. The pedestrian's basic inclination is to keep the issue local so that time, energy and resources will not be wasted. Moreover, the risk of failure is higher, or believed higher, when the pedestrian takes the dispute a greater distance. In these cases he is away from the personal, face-to-face context of the neighbourhood, and possibly away from more sympathetic judges.

A second factor keeping the pedestrian at a localized level of authority is the possibility that the central authorities themselves refuse to deal with certain individuals. There may be strict conditions of entry to higher orders of authority.[7] For example an exceptionally young man, a man alien to the area, a man involved in strictly a family problem, may not be accepted as a disputant by a higher authority.

Toward a Theory of Political Mobility

In attempting to relate ideas of a pedestrians society to a broader theory of rural change, three basic steps are important. First, a statement of the basic thesis on mobility; second, its linkage to an existing body of theory; and third a discussion of the elements in the theory, their relationships, and the method whereby the change process occurs.

Thesis. The distance a man must travel to attain authoritative decisions and other political services will determine his basic political arena. The greater the political mobility and the greater number of political central places an individual can attain, the greater his access to political information and services and the greater his potential rewards. As political mobility increases

7. A parallel would be the idea of 'threshold' among some central place theorists.

for large numbers of people the more rapid other political, economic, and social changes in the rural area will occur. Rural change will occur when the pedestrian access to central political places increases.

Links to other theory. The pedestrian thesis is linked to the work of Daniel Lerner dealing with the modernization of traditional societies.[8] Lerner argues that urbanization is a key variable in the process of modernization. Briefly stated, he suggests that the first step occurs when a peasant empathizes with a modern, urban life style. Urbanization leads to literacy, which leads to mass media exposure, which leads to an increased economic status (income) and greater political participation (voting). The latter factors are equated with modernization.

A key question would seem to be: what leads initially to urbanization, or in effect to the pedestrian's greater use of urban centres. The answers lie in peasant mobility and spatiality, in the movement of peasants within their neighbourhood microcosm, and the process whereby they travel out of this microcosm. In short, if we understood more of this general process of peasant mobility, we would understand more of the process of rural change and modernization.

Factors in the mobility process. Attitudes toward movement are dictated by the relative magnetism of the home village versus the attraction of the outside world, or the attraction of the higher order of central places. Peasant mobility is first determined by a set of preconditions effecting his general disposition toward movement. The manner by which this political mobility occurs, and therby effects rural change may be conceptually viewed in five stages: the pre-conditions of the process, the antecedents, the process, the consequences and the implications expected.

Using the characteristics that have distinguished the pedestrian society as the departure point, the attainment of political mobility for an individual would be illustrated in Figure 3.

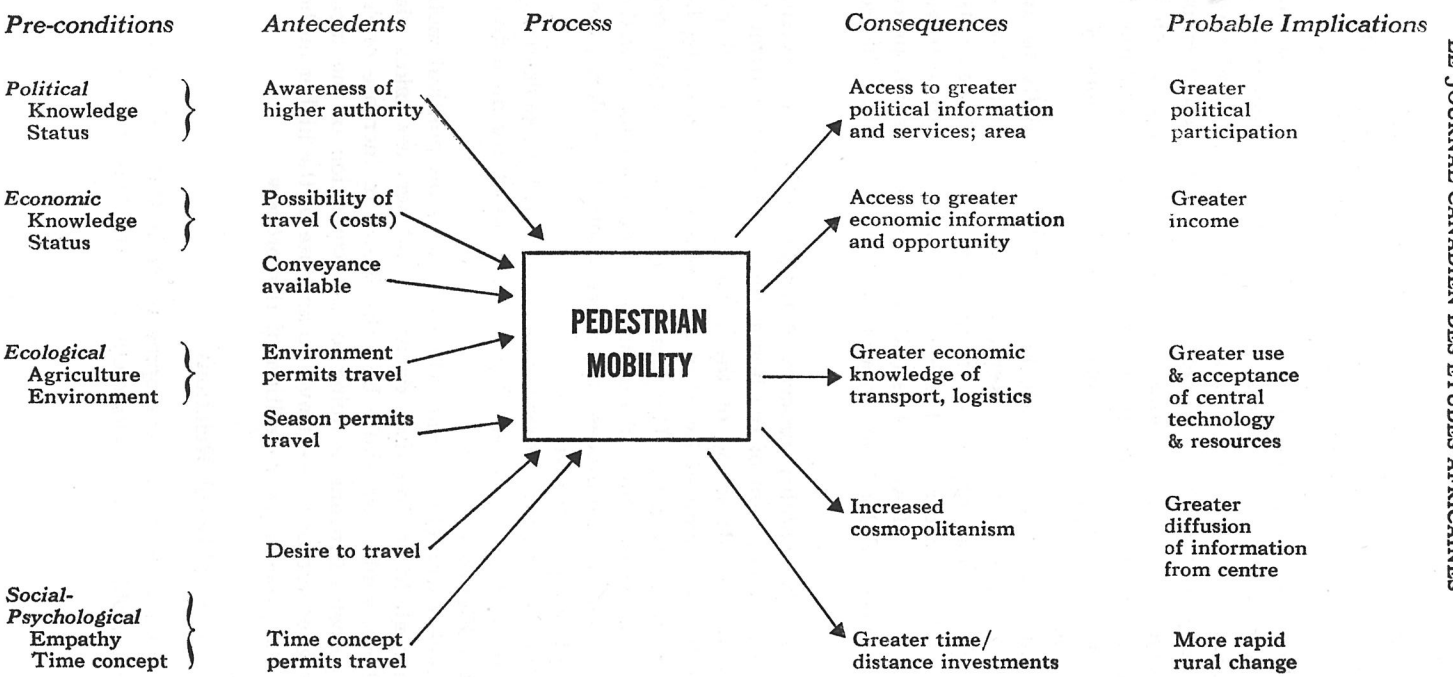
The process whereby an individual increases his political mobility and thus goes farther afield for political decisions and services takes place at several stages. These would essentially be: the desire to increase one's political mobility → perceived means of doing so → acquisition of the means → awareness of a higher authority → travel to and use of the higher authority → satisfaction in the process → repetition of the process.

Conclusion: Central-Local Relations

A tragic paradox in the developing world is that the governments who face the greatest problems of development have the least resources to do so. Most

8. *op. cit.*

FIGURE 3


Pre-conditions
Antecedents
Process
Consequences
Probable Implications
Political
Knowledge
Status
Economic
Knowledge
Status
Ecological
Agriculture
Environment
Social-
Psychological
Empathy
Time concept
Awareness of higher authority
Possibility of travel (costs)
Conveyance available
Environment permits travel
Season permits travel
Desire to travel
Time concept permits travel
PEDESTRIAN MOBILITY
Access to greater political information and services; area
Access to greater economic information and opportunity
Greater economic knowledge of transport, logistics
Increased cosmopolitanism
Greater time/ distance investments
Greater political participation
Greater income
Greater use & acceptance of central technology & resources
Greater diffusion of information from centre
More rapid rural change

central governments are incredibly handicapped. They lack a critical mass in terms of energy and infrastructure. They usually have poor resources, poor income, and poor administrative machinery for the tasks at hand.

Regional levels of the government which should serve to amplify the technical and innovative messages from the centre are often bureaucratic quagmires that effectively stifle messages. Below this the district and sub-district representatives of the central government, who should serve as translators of the messages to the people, and as shock absorbers of harsh demands, often simply do not function. This is a failure of the centre to penetrate the periphery. The government is unable to cause change at the local level. The problem is the diffusion of power and authority from the centre.

From the central administrators viewpoint, a key policy issue lies in how many scarce resources are to be invested in building up the centre before the periphery is treated. For some nations there is also a policy indecision on how the centre controls the periphery. It is often a question of direct control using a hierarchical, Napoleonic administrative system, or of indirect control by which central officials work within some federated system, dealing with regional officials in an agreed balance of power.[9]

Given these difficulties it is easy to see how central-local communications break down. The stimulus, for the individual, to increase his political mobility, however, may come from influences other than those initiated by the centre. Visitors in the village, returning migrant workers, magazines, pictures, or gossip about conditions elsewhere can trigger a man's desire for greater political mobility. It is in this sense, in the initiative of the individual, that the political horizon will be expanded. As is the case in most societies, the pedestrian will be moved to political action by the things that effect him directly: his purse, his dignity, his food, his family or his future.

9. For further comments on this question see A. R. Zolberg, 'Political Development in Tropical Africa: Center and Periphery'. Paper delivered at the conference on Local Development in Sub-Saharan Africa, Foreign Service Institute, Washington, D.C., 1967.